

LIBRARY SERVICES FOR HISPANIC PATRONS

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Data from the 2000 Census show that “the Hispanic population has grown faster than the overall U.S. population since 1990 and is projected to become the largest U.S. minority group by 2005,”¹ comprising 12.6% of the U.S. population. By 2050 that number will increase to 25%.² The implications of these statistics give a clear mandate to public libraries to develop collections and services to meet the needs of the growing Hispanic population. This paper discusses the history of library services to Hispanics and current needs for staff development, marketing, programming, outreach services, and collection development to provide these services.

According to Article I of the American Library Association’s Bill of Rights, “books and other library resources should be provided for the interest, information, and enlightenment of all people of the community the library serves,” and “a person’s right to use the library should not be denied or abridged because of origin, age, background, or views.”³ It is a library’s responsibility to know its community makeup and to provide services that are appropriate to the needs of the population. With the growing population of Spanish-speaking minorities, these statements increasingly point to the need for libraries to serve the Hispanic community by providing bilingual and multicultural information.

This concept that libraries are responsible for providing services to bilingual patrons is not new; the first handbook offered on the subject of library services for immigrants and new Americans was published in 1929 by the American Library Association. Although much of the information presented in this document is now dated, the fundamental ideas presented are still noteworthy. In 1929, the ALA observed and expressed a need to incorporate bilingual material into collections where large groups of immigrants resided. The organization also realized that this material should be shelved in an easily accessible, clearly labeled area. Furthermore, the ALA noted that texts that are easy to read but also contain adult appeal would help attract immigrants to the library.⁴

Despite the ALA’s early recognition that libraries should serve immigrant populations, the growing Spanish-speaking population in the United States did not make providing Spanish-English services in particular a widespread necessity in libraries until the 1970s. In 1971, Robert P. Haro wrote, “the library world is just becoming aware of the growing Mexican-American [the term “Mexican American” is used by the author to indicate all Hispanic cultures] movement.”⁵ Haro’s statement lends credence to Gilda Baeza’s similar assertion that prior to 1970, documented sources of information regarding “library services to the Hispanic population [were] virtually nonexistent.”⁶ As libraries became aware of the growing Hispanic population in the 1970s and 1980s, those with Spanish-speaking individuals in their communities developed special areas, programs, and collections within their facilities. Although some attempts were made to create branch libraries or library-like environments in Mexican-American neighborhoods called *barrios*, notably in Albuquerque, Tucson, and Los Angeles, few outreach services were developed.⁷

As the Hispanic population grew through the 1990’s and continues to do so today, library services to Spanish-speaking patrons have become more universal and more comprehensive. Most libraries must provide bilingual and multicultural resources in some capacity, varying according to the demographic makeup of an individual library’s surrounding community, the library’s mission, and the information needs of the community. Library managers who are developing or continuing services to the Hispanic members of their community should focus on training and informing the library staff, providing an accessible and useful collection, offering appropriate programming, and taking services outside of the library to reach out to the community.

As with many other areas of library management, the library staff can be a manager’s most important resource in meeting the needs of its Spanish-speaking population. In order for a library to adequately serve its diverse community, the library staff must recognize the importance of providing multicultural resources and

services. As Denise Agosto states, the attitude of the librarians is the "single most significant factor contributing to the general atmosphere of your library."⁸ This will affect the way that patrons experience and view the library and will determine whether the library's resources are utilized. The best way to encourage staff to embrace a library's commitment to serving its diverse population is to educate the staff on the social and educational benefits of providing multicultural materials.⁹ Not only is such service in line with the ALA Bill of Rights, but it also encourages all patrons to value diversity.

When developing the library's services to Hispanic-American patrons, the library manager and staff should reevaluate the library's mission statement. The mission statement should reflect the library's commitment to supporting cultural diversity or to serving the needs of all members of the community. Next, the library must evaluate its community to determine how the library can best meet the needs of all patrons. In addition to studying demographics, the library should also determine "how it is perceived in the community."¹⁰ This will enable the library to know its potential users and to understand the best ways to make its services available to them. Questionnaires and interviews are aids that will enable the library to collect data from existing patrons. However, the library must also determine which groups in the community are currently using the library and which the library needs to reach out to. Establishing the exact cultural groups that will be served and their specific demands will better enable library management to decide which materials and services it should supply. Marcia Trotta suggests walking or driving around the community and studying its characteristics, at different times and on different days, to get a good picture.¹¹ Listening to the community will help the library to identify needs to be addressed. Hispanic radio call-in shows can provide insight, as will engaging people in informal interviews and casual discussions while attending community events with other staff members.

Depending on the needs of the community, a library may want to ensure that it has bilingual staff who can communicate comfortably with Spanish-speaking patrons in either language. While all librarians should be able to serve people of different cultures, some librarians argue that "bilingual librarians are necessary for basic interaction with the public."¹² Staff who are not able to communicate with patrons in Spanish as well as English still remain important to the library's bilingual and multicultural services. Bilingual reference tools such as *Habla Español? No, but I Can Try to Help You: Practical Spanish for the Reference Desk* and *Hablando Español en la Biblioteca* will be helpful to English-speaking librarians serving Spanish-speaking patrons.

After the library management and staff have determined the unique needs of its community, they should begin developing a collection that fits these needs. Authors and titles from each nationality represented in the community should be included in the collection. The Multilingual Materials Subcommittee of the American Library Association recommends that a variety of literary genres and subjects be included in a multilingual collection in order to reflect the interests of the community and that a library own more than one copy of printed materials such as books and magazines.¹³ Materials should also be purchased in a variety of formats; including print, audio, and audio-visual. When purchasing materials for a collection, the scope and content of each item should be carefully evaluated. For example, an encyclopedia published in Mexico may provide coverage of the Mayan Indians of Mexico and Central America but no information on the Incan Indians of Peru. Additionally, the titles in this collection must be regularly evaluated to ensure that they continue to meet the needs of the community.

Easy physical access to the resources in a multicultural collection is an important issue for the library. Items within the collection must be housed such that patrons can easily access them. They should be located separately from the regular collection so there is no need to canvas shelves with English-language labels to locate materials. Likewise, Web resources should be accessible from the library's main homepage, centralized, and easy to navigate. When determining the physical location of the library's multicultural collection, the librarians should also assess the library environment to ensure that it depicts a diversity of ethnic and cultural groups in order to make all patrons feel at home in the library.¹⁴

Although Hispanics are quickly becoming the largest minority within the United States, many American publishers are slow in publishing titles in both English and Spanish. While this publishing trend is changing, a library may have to purchase some materials from small, independent distributors or from bookstores. There are many Web sites that will aid librarians in locating Spanish materials. One such site is CLNet, available at <http://clnet.sscnet.ucla.edu/library/library.html>. This site is maintained by the Regents of the University of California.

One category of materials that is needed, but not always provided, in a Hispanic collection is Spanish-language newspapers. Although many Spanish-language and bilingual newspapers are free, many libraries overlook these vital resource materials. Most cities with a substantial Hispanic community will have some type of local Spanish newspaper. This would be the best starting point in adding resources to a special collection. The local paper is also a wonderful resource in establishing ties with the Hispanic communities.

Developing a partnership with such a paper would allow the library access to those in the community who might not otherwise have contact with the library. There are several prominent newspapers in larger cities, such as *El Salvador USA* and *Colombia Informa* in Los Angeles, that carry news from Central and South America as well as Mexico and the Caribbean.¹⁵ By including some of these larger newspapers in the collection, a wider section of the community will be reached and served.

Spanish reference resources also need to be included in a Hispanic collection. Many of these sources can be found in both electronic and print formats. There are several good Spanish dictionaries and encyclopedias, but, again, the scope and content of each item must be examined. Some Spanish reference materials are geared toward Latin America, omitting important facts that relate to Spain, while others are more comprehensive in focus. One excellent resource that any Spanish reference collection should include is the *Diccionario de la Real Academia Española* (the *Royal Spanish Academy Dictionary*). This is the most respected Spanish dictionary in the Hispanic world.¹⁶

One important aspect of collection development for a multicultural collection is cataloguing Spanish and bilingual items in ways that make them accessible to the intended users. Cataloging these materials needs to be done in both Spanish and English. Over the past twenty years, significant improvements have been made in the development of digital access tools including online catalogs of Hispanic and ethnic collections, indexes to periodical literature such as the *Chicano Database* and the *Hispanic American Periodicals Index* (HAPI), and subject vocabularies such as the *Chicano Thesaurus* and *Bilindex*. However, attention must be given to the types of subject headings used as many are general, biased, or nonspecific to the topics covered by the materials. According to REFORMA, the National Association to Promote Library and Information Services to Latinos and the Spanish-Speaking, listing all Hispanic materials under the term "Hispanic" or "Hispanic Americans" does not adequately provide access to the wide range of topics in the "Hispanic" community.¹⁷ Specific cultural terms should be used rather than strict translations.

Although many modern libraries follow some of these suggestions, many more are not fully meeting the needs of their patrons. It is not enough to simply provide resources for Spanish-speaking patrons; a library staff must also provide programming that will acquaint this demographic with the material available to them. Library programs should facilitate growth for all age groups, from preschool to adulthood. In addition, a library could sizably increase its patronage by offering well-planned and well-researched programs to the local Hispanic community.

Perhaps the most effective method of drawing Hispanic individuals into the public library is to offer programming geared towards their individual needs. Library-initiated programs could include speeches, community forums, discussion groups, demonstrations, displays, classes, and live or media presentations. The library staff is responsible for selecting the topics, speakers, and resource materials for library-initiated programs based on the community's interests and information needs. However, this does not mean that a library's staff is responsible for the whole of a new program. The library may choose to participate in cooperative programs with other agencies, organizations, institutions, or individuals as part of its effort to address information needs and to facilitate information access in the community the library serves.

Many libraries across the country have instituted successful programs to aid their Latino populations. One way to do this is to make use of public holidays. Many public libraries have incorporated the Spanish holiday Día de los Niños into their library programming. Hispanic authors such as Pat Mora have been instrumental in appointing the day to celebrate "Día de los Libros," a day to recognize the benefits of bilingual literacy.¹⁸ Children's Book Week in November is another opportunity for libraries to promote literacy for their Hispanic patrons.

In addition to celebrating diversity on specific dates and holidays, local libraries should regularly sponsor programs that provide services for their Hispanic patrons. These may include homework help and book clubs that include children of different cultures. In multicultural book clubs, a library may pair an English-speaking student with a Spanish-speaking student to discuss bilingual or multicultural works.¹⁹ Because libraries are also a point of access for computers, especially for lower-income families, libraries may also consider offering computer clubs and technology workshops. Since young people have an affinity for technology, these programs attract young people to the library and help all patrons to develop computer skills.²⁰ "Budding Authors" is yet another program that has been made available to young people; in this program, children are paired with mentor writers to develop their creative writing skills. Hispanic children may be paired with English- or Spanish-speaking mentors and encouraged to write in both English and Spanish.²¹

Libraries also have the opportunity to offer enrichment to the Hispanic members of their communities by encouraging entire families to participate in library programs. Family literacy programs can provide for the needs of both children and their parents. They include components such as Spanish literacy and ESL/GED courses for adults while also addressing the children's reading readiness skills.²² One program that has proven

very beneficial to Hispanic families is the bilingual story hour. There are three basic formats in which this can be conducted. The first involves two presenters, each reading a story in their native language. The second includes only one presenter who reads a story in English but includes key words or phrases in Spanish. The third requires an individual who is fluent in both languages. In this model, the reader code switches from one language to the other while reading the selected story.²³

Examples of successful story hours can be noted at public libraries in cities such as Charlotte, North Carolina; Tucson, Arizona; Miami, Florida; and, Covington, Kentucky. In all of these cases, the library staff was not itself fluent in Spanish. However, they made their programs successful by soliciting aid from community partners of Hispanic/Latino descent. Also, the libraries went out of their way to publicize the event with press releases and photo opportunities for local media. Many of the libraries also composed bilingual fliers advertising the event.²⁴ When accompanied by food, music, and other festivities, a bilingual story hour can turn into a social event that helps bring different members of the community together and showcases the talents of both Hispanic and non-Hispanic residents. Most importantly, as children learn bilingual stories and begin to tell their own, they are learning to discriminate different speech sounds and learn the correct rhythm and structure of a new language.²⁵

Regardless of the resources and programs that a library has to offer its Spanish-speaking patrons, these resources will not benefit the community unless individual patrons access them. Services that reach out into the community are probably the best way to introduce Hispanics to the realm of services offered by a library. Hispanics who have had negative experiences in schools may equate libraries with schools and feel generally negative toward the library. Providing “services on the user’s own turf” can help overcome such barriers and draw in reluctant patrons.²⁶

Many of the programs that are offered on-site at libraries can also be offered off-site in churches, community centers, or other neighborhood locations. These programs should fill community needs and be interactive. Examples include providing bilingual story times in shopping areas or day care centers in Hispanic neighborhoods; partnering with hospitals to provide visits to children and packets for parents; placing collections of Spanish, English, and bilingual adult and preschool books in non-profit agencies, doctor’s offices, and hospitals; visiting school classes or after-school programs to tell stories, give book talks, or present special programs of interest to the students; and, planning programs that celebrating the Hispanic cultures, such as films and holiday events.

Libraries may get ideas about outreach programming by benchmarking other libraries and learning from their efforts. The West Indianapolis Branch of the Indianapolis Marion County Public Library (IMCPL) serves a large Hispanic population. Greg Jackson, the Adult Services Librarian at the branch, described the outreach efforts his branch undertakes to provide services to this group in a telephone interview. Branch manager Michael Perry “goes into the schools to build community relations among the kids, who are usually the interpreters for the older folks.”²⁷ He also provides materials for a school that has a strong ESL program for children. These endeavors draw the children and their families into the branch, where they can access the traveling collections of bilingual and Spanish materials that rotate among the branches and participate in library programs. One such program planned for the near future is “Taste of Soul,” which will combine African-American and Latino cultures through food and music.

With all programming efforts, both in the library and in the community, it is important to market the event appropriately. Creative marketing that combines traditional and non-traditional methods is imperative to reaching the library’s goal of making library resources available to all. Sharon Chickering Moller recommends that libraries “create a high profile in the community” through word-of-mouth advertising and public service announcements in Spanish on local radio and television stations. Research indicates that “Spanish-language advertising on television more positively influences Hispanics.”²⁸ This is because many “lower-income Latinos are not accustomed to reading anything, [thus] written notices and flyers may not attract their attention.”²⁹ However, strategically placing and distributing flyers where people congregate, such as stores, laundromats, bus stops, churches, and social services offices, may also be effective. Other ideas for print marketing efforts include articles, program notices, and advertisements in Spanish-language newspapers.³⁰

A final way that libraries can access their communities is by participating in community events. Libraries should take advantage of opportunities to participate in events such as health fairs, celebrations, festivals, literacy fairs, sporting events, and school programs. They can give away bilingual items such as refrigerator magnets, bookmarks, free books, or coupons for a free book on the first visit to the library, and tell people what the library has to offer. If staff is bilingual, they can speak in both languages, allowing the Hispanic person to make the choice of which language to speak. When signing them up for a library card, it might be a good idea to give them a free temporary card instead of checking their ID to avoid the implication that their immigration status is being checked. A library could also offer choices of library card designs and languages.

One potential barrier that a library may face in adequately serving its Hispanic community is a lack of funding. However, in these times when the economy is tight and funding is becoming one of the main issues affecting libraries, the availability of grants specifically for the serving the Spanish-speaking community is growing.³¹ REFORMA is a wonderful resource in locating grants specifically for Hispanic collection development. The Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) also provides grants to libraries wishing to further develop their Hispanic collections. Creative fundraising or sponsorship could also help a library to avoid additional expenditure.

It takes the talents of an entire staff to truly meet the needs of a library's diverse community. The ALA Bill of Rights states that "library-initiated programs take advantage of library staff expertise, collections, services, and facilities to increase access to information and information resources."³² Each individual's personal talents should be explored and developed, and the responsibility of providing effective services should be delegated by the head of the library or library department. Resources such as the REFORMA website are also excellent tools to gain access to booklists, programming ideas, and staff development programs. Not only must library personnel become involved, but members of the community must be willing to participate in order to make bilingual programs a success. Community partners who are fluent in the culture and language are excellent resources for a library in its efforts to serve the multicultural needs of its community. These needs are met primarily through the library's staff, collection, programming, and outreach services.

NOTES

¹ NCLR, *Twenty Most Frequently Asked Questions About the Latino Community* [Internet] (2001 [cited 22 November 2003]); available from http://www.nclr.org/about/nclrfaq_print.html.

² Debbie Becht, Kevin Taglang, and Anthony Wilhelm, *The Digital Divide and the US Hispanic Population* (1) [Internet] (The Benton Foundation, 1999 [cited 4 November 2003]); available from <http://www.benton.org/publibrary/digitalbeat/db080699.html>.

³ *Library-Initiated Programs as a Resource: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights*, [Internet] (American Library Association, July 12 2000 [cited 15 November 2003]); available from <http://www.ala.org/Template.cfm?Section=Interpretations&Template=/ContentManagement/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=8580>.

⁴ *Reading Service to the Foreign Born*, (Chicago: American Library Association, 1929), 39.

⁵ Robert P. Haro, "Bicultural and Bilingual Americans: A Need for Understanding" in "Library Programs and Services to the Disadvantaged," Ed. Helen Huguenor Lyman, *Library Trends* 20, no. 2 (1971): 256.

⁶ Gilda Baeza, "The Evolution of Educational and Public Library Services to Spanish-Speaking

Children," in *Library Services for Hispanic Children: A Guide for Public and School Librarians*, ed. Adela Artola Allen (Phoenix, AZ: Oryx Press, 1987), 3.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Denise E. Agosto, "Bridging the Culture Gap: Ten Steps toward a More Multicultural Youth

Library," in *Journal of Youth Services in Libraries* (IUPUI University Library: H. W. Wilson, 2001).

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Marcia Trotta, *Managing Library Outreach Programs: A How-to-Do-It Manual for Librarians* (New York: Neal-Schuman, 1993), 6.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Isabel Espinal, "Wanted: Latino Librarians," *Criticas* 3 (2003): 19.

¹³ American Library Association, *Guidelines for the Development of Multilingual Materials Collections* [Internet] (Reference and User Services Association, 2002 [cited 20 October 2003]); available from http://www.ala.org/Content/NavigationMenu/RUSA/Our_Association2/RUSA_Sections/MOUSS/Our_Section4/Committees10/Spanish-Speaking/rev_guidelines.doc.

¹⁴ Agosto, "Bridging the Culture Gap: Ten Steps toward a More Multicultural Youth Library."

¹⁵ Bruce Jensen, "Free Spanish-Language Newspapers in Libraries," *Criticas* 3 (2003): 12.

¹⁶ Peter Jacso, "Digital Ready-Reference Sources in Spanish," *Information Today* 20 (2003): 18.

¹⁷ REFORMA, *Home Page on-Line* [Internet] (2003 [cited 20 November 2003]); available from <http://www.reforma.org>.

¹⁸ Sharon Chickering Moller, *Library Service to Spanish Speaking Patrons: A Practical Guide* (Englewood, CO: Libraries Unlimited, 2001), 75.

¹⁹ Barbara Immroth and Kathernine de la Pena McCook, *Library Services to Youth of Hispanic Heritage* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2000), 20.

²⁰ Moller, *Library Service to Spanish Speaking Patrons: A Practical Guide*, 76.

²¹ Immroth and de la Pena McCook, *Library Services to Youth of Hispanic Heritage*, 20.

²² Moller, *Library Service to Spanish Speaking Patrons: A Practical Guide*, 57.

²³ Diana Borrego and Lorena Flores, "Bilingual Formats for Story Times and Storytelling Presentations," in *The Power of Language: Selected Papers from the Second Reforma National Conference* (Englewood, CO: Libraries Unlimited, 2001), 155-56.

²⁴ Sarah Howrey, "De Colores: The Universal Language of Bilingual Storytime," *American Libraries* 34, no. 9 (2003): 38.

²⁵ Ibid.: 41.

²⁶ Trotta, *Managing Library Outreach Programs: A How-to-Do-It Manual for Librarians*, 4.

²⁷ Greg Jackson, Telephone Interview, 29 November 2003.

²⁸ Moller, *Library Service to Spanish Speaking Patrons: A Practical Guide*, 27.

²⁹ Ibid., 25.

³⁰ *Delivering Information on Consumer Protection: How to Outreach Hispanics*, in *Consumer Interests Annual* (IUPUI University Library: EBSCOhost, 2001), 1.

³¹ Andrew R. Albanese, "In Tough Budget Times, Grants Aid Collections," *Criticas* 3 (2003): 12.

³² *Library-Initiated Programs as a Resource: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights*,.

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